10 Things to Know About the Drunk Driving Prevention Technology Provision in the Infrastructure Bill

A key provision in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed by both the House and Senate and signed into law by President Joe Biden on November 15 will lead to a new national safety standard requiring state-of-the-art smart technology in all new cars that would ultimately eliminate drunk driving.

This comes as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports alcohol-related traffic deaths rose by 9 percent in 2020 despite vehicle miles traveled plummeting by 430 billion miles. Traffic deaths have soared in the first half of 2021, largely due to impaired driving, speeding an not wearing a seatbelt. Drunk driving is costing the U.S. economy $120 billion a year.

"Passage of this legislation is the most significant, lifesaving public policy victory in MADD's 41-year history," said MADD National President Alex Otte. "It marks the beginning of the end of drunk driving."

Here are 10 things to know about the drunk driving prevention tech provision:

1. **The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) would initiate a rulemaking process.**

The legislation gives NHTSA three years to evaluate technologies and set the standard for impaired driving prevention technology on all new vehicles.

2. **Automakers would be given two to three years to implement the new standard**.

New cars equipped with the NHTSA-directed technology could start rolling off the assembly line in 2026-2027.

3. **Advanced passive technology systems to prevent drunk driving already exist or are in development.**

MADD documented in a Request for Information (RFI) response to NHTSA in May 2021 that 241 advanced drunk and impaired driving prevention technologies exist. Many of them could be deployed today.

- **Driving performance monitoring systems** that monitor the vehicle movement with systems like lane departure warning and attention assist;

- **Driver monitoring systems** that monitor the driver's head and eyes, typically using a camera or other sensors;
- **Passive alcohol detection systems** that use sensors to determine whether a driver is drunk and then prevent the vehicle from moving.

Driving performance and driver monitoring systems could be beneficial not only to prevent drunk driving, but to detect other dangerous behaviors that lead to crashes such as drowsy driving, distracted driving, and even medical emergencies.

4. **Passive alcohol detection systems are not simple breathalyzers or ignition interlock devices.**

This smart technology has **NO relation** to police breathalyzers or to ignition interlock devices that require a motorist to actively blow into a device. Advanced alcohol detection systems use sensors integrated into a car that passively determine if the person behind the wheel is drunk.

5. **Research supports technological solutions to end drunk driving.**

More than 9,400 lives could be saved annually if all new cars have drunk driving prevention technology as standard equipment, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

6. **The technology should be mandated, not voluntary, as standard equipment in all new cars.**

The auto industry has the resources and expertise to make safety advancements like drunk driving prevention a reality, much the same way it has used its R&D prowess for self-driving vehicles, electrification and many safety innovations.

Some examples:

Subaru

On September 8, 2021, Euro NCAP tweeted the following "The all-new but conventionally powered Subaru Outback achieves an outstanding score of 95 percent for Safety Assist! 👏The car is equipped with a system which detects signs of fatigue or impairment directly from the driver's eye movements and combines this with steering behaviour."

- https://twitter.com/EuroNCAP/status/1435540141649575936

Volvo

Volvo has been adding in-car sensors and cameras to its vehicles, aimed at enhancing safety by monitoring drivers for signs of intoxication and distraction, then intervening to prevent crashes. It made the following announcements in March 2019.

- **Volvo Video:** https://www.media.volvocars.com/global/en-gb/media/videos/250162/in-car-cameras-and-intervention-against-intoxication-distraction-animation1
- **Volvo Press Release:** https://www.media.volvocars.com/global/en-gb/media/pressreleases/250015/volvo-cars-to-deploy-in-car-cameras-and-intervention-against-intoxication-distraction

Nissan

Nissan unveiled a new concept car in 2007 with multiple preventive features against drunk and impaired driving. It used alcohol odor sensors, facial monitoring and vehicle operational behavior to detect driver impairment.

- https://www.nissan-global.com/EN/TECHNOLOGY/OVERVIEW/dpcc.html

Toyota

Toyota announced a drunk driving prevention system in 2007 with hopes of having it in cars by the end of 2009. The technology was described as a fail-safe system using sensors to detect the bodily presence of alcohol or impaired behavior.

- https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna16449687
- https://www.ctvnews.ca/toyota-developing-cars-that-detect-drunk-driving-1.221761

7. **The timeline is reasonable.**

MADD is confident the timeline can be met with existing technologies and those currently being developed. For example, one technology entity that is pursuing DUI-prevention technology, The Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety (DADSS), states that their current timeline for use in consumer vehicles is by 2024 for the breath system and 2025 for the touch system. This timetable for installation in cars is well within the statutory and regulatory timeline specified in the pending congressional legislation.

8. **MADD is neutral on the technology options.**

As MADD documented in a Request for Information (RFI) response to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in May 2021, there are many potential technologies to prevent drunk driving. As soon as any one solution is proven effective, it must be introduced and implemented immediately as standard equipment in all new cars. If additional drunk driving prevention technologies are proven effective, they should be implemented subsequently.

9. **MADD spearheaded this bipartisan effort.**

The House bill was championed by Reps. Debbie Dingell (D-MI), David McKinley (R-WV) and Kathleen Rice (D-NY). The Senate bill is led by Senators Ben Ray Luján (D-NM), Rick Scott (R-FL), Gary Peters (D-MI), and Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV).

Provisions from the Senate bill are now included in the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed by the Senate on August 10 and the House on November 5. Similar provisions were included in the House-passed INVEST in America Act passed on July 1.

10. **American consumers strongly support Congressional action.**

According to a recent nationwide poll conducted by Ipsos for MADD, 9 of 10 Americans support technology that is integrated into a car's electronics to prevent drunk driving (89% say it is a good or very good idea), while 3 of 4 (77%) back Congressional action to require this technology in all new vehicles. More broadly, 8 of 10 (83%) believe that new auto safety features should be standard in vehicles as they become available, not part of optional equipment packages.

About Mothers Against Drunk Driving
Founded in 1980 by a mother whose daughter was killed by a drunk driver, Mothers Against Drunk Driving® (MADD) is the nation's largest nonprofit working to end drunk driving, help fight drugged driving, support the victims of these violent crimes and prevent underage drinking. MADD has helped to save more than 400,000 lives, reduce drunk driving deaths by more than 50 percent and promote designating a non-drinking driver. MADD's Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving® calls for law enforcement support, ignition interlocks for all offenders and advanced vehicle technology. MADD has provided supportive services to nearly one million drunk and drugged driving victims and survivors at no charge through local victim advocates and the 24-Hour Victim Help Line 1-877-MADD-HELP. Visit http://www.madd.org or call 1-877-ASK-MADD.

About The Survey
The poll was conducted March 5 to March 7, 2021, by Ipsos using their KnowledgePanel®. This poll is based on a nationally representative probability sample of 1,016 general population adults age 18 or older, with a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

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